

Nation Target Programme on New Rural Development The Evolution of Concepts in Historical Perspective

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Abstract: Nation Target Programme on New Rural Development (NTP-NRD), launched in 2009, has been one of Vietnam's main programs in recent decades. The government of Vietnam considers the success of NTP-NRD as the major drivers of the country's industrialization and modernization. After over five years of implementation, the Program has achieved some remarkable successes. However, there have been difficulties facing the government of Vietnam in further development and meeting the goals of new rural programme – new rural development (NRP-NRD). This paper provides some insights on the concepts of “new rural area”, “new rural development” from historical perspective. This paper aims to discuss the emergence of “new rural development” ideas as well as its formation as a national target program. This paper argues that the ideas of new rural development program had come before the advent of historical Resolution 26 (2008), tracing back to the 4th Party Congress in 1976. The paper seeks to describe the process of evolution of this concept into a national target program through the roles of policy-makers, especially the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV).

Key words: National Target Programme on New Rural Development; new rural development; policy making; Communist Party of Vietnam; the government of Vietnam; historical perspective.

1. Introduction

Since the renovation (*Đổi Mới*) in 1986, Vietnam has achieved considerable successes in almost every socio-economics area. The poverty headcount well decreased from 58.1 percent in 1993 to 14.5 percent by 2008, and to below 10 percent by 2010, according to an estimate from the World Bank (Kozel et al., 2014: 1). As a result of these remarkable progresses, by 2011, Vietnam became a middle income country. Nevertheless, it can be claimed that Vietnam is still far from its modernization's and industrialization's goals because of heavy dependence on agriculture. In 2013, the proportion of agriculture in the gross social product decreased from 44.6 percent in 1981 (Nguyễn Văn Bích, 2007: 303-304), to

just 18.38 percent; meanwhile, the industrial share stood in the second position at 38.31 percent following the service sector's proposition with 43.31 percent. However, the proportion of agriculture in the economic structure is still very high. According to Nguyễn Văn Bích (Nguyễn Văn Bích, 2007: 305-306), the share of agriculture in GDP should be below 5 percent to be

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considered as meeting the standard of an industrialized economy. To put this into perspective, the share of agriculture in GDP in 2013 of the most developed economies in the world such as the United Kingdom, Japan or the United States is just 0.7, 1.2 and 1.4 percent respectively. In other middle income countries such as Malaysia, Thailand or Indonesia, agriculture also contributes to a share of lower than 15 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) (data from World Bank)⁽¹⁾. It is believed that the decline of agriculture share in GDP must be in parallel with the increase in the quality of agricultural economy and the sustainable growth of rural area.

Due to the importance of agriculture and rural area, Vietnam has implemented many programs and projects aiming at eliminating poverty in rural areas and empowering the poor such as: The Socio-economics Programme for Extremely Difficult Communes in Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas (P135-II) based on Decision No.7/2006/QĐ-TTg on 10th January 2006; National Target Programme for Poverty Reduction 2006 - 2010 based on Decision 20/2007/QĐ-TTg on 5th February 2007; Rapid and Sustainable Poverty Reduction Programme for the 62 Poorest Districts based on Resolution 30a/2008/NQ-CP on 27th December 2008; Support for access to land, housing and access to water (P134) based on Decision No.134/2004/QĐ-TTg on 20th July 2004 and so on (Jones et al., 2009: 9-12). NTP-NRD started in 2009, is one of the national target programs designed for the period 2010-2020. At the central level, the program has its Steering Committee and Coordination Office. At the local level (provinces and cities directly under the central government),

there are National Target Program Steering Committees for each province's/city's NTP-NRD. Besides the web portal for the NTP-NRD at <http://nongthonmoi.gov.vn/>, provinces and cities also have their own web portals to update on the information on their NTP-NRD in their local areas. According to a report by the Central Steering Committee for NTP-NRD, by the end of 2014, there had been 785 communes meeting new rural areas criteria (accounting for 8.8 percent of all the communes nationwide), increasing by 600 communes compared to the figure recorded in May 2014 (Thành Chung, 2015). The NTP-NRD is one of the most recent attempts by the Government of Vietnam to realize that approach. This program is developed based on the assumption that agriculture and rural areas (and farmers) are the fundamental pillars of the industrialization and modernization of Vietnam at least until 2020.

Having been implemented for more than five years nationwide, however, there has surprisingly been a scant literature on NTP-NRD in Vietnam. Apart from a few reports represented at an international seminar themed "Some current issues related to NTP-NRD in Vietnam" (December 2011), such as Nguyễn Quang Thuần (2011), raising the point of "precarious agriculture, disadvantaged farmers and backward rural area", which generalizes the situation of agriculture, farmers and rural area in the 25 years of renovation; Nguyễn Đăng Khoa (2011), presenting and clarifying basic contents of NTP-NRD; Đỗ Thiên Kính (2011), in an analysis of the social structure

⁽¹⁾ The shares of agriculture in GDP of Malaysia, Thai Lan and Indonesia are 9, 12 and 13.7 respectively.

in Vietnam, identifying the difficulties in reaching the standards of labor structure outlined in Criterion 12 of the national criteria; Bùi Tất Thắng (2011), analyzing the shift of economic models in NTP-NRD, little examination on the Program from the historical perspective has been found. Recent studies, for instance Nguyễn Xuân Thắng and Bùi Quang Dũng (2013) mention some important documents marking the development of NTP-NRD policy-making, yet they have clarified the evolution of the central concepts, i.e., “new rural development” and “new rural area”. It is necessary to bring back this topic into scholarly debates.

Given its importance in the Government of Vietnam’s socio-economic strategy and plans in the next decade, this paper is aimed to clarify the process of formulating the ideas and making the policies in order to create the legal framework for the NTP-NRD on the national level. By applying the historical perspective on policy making, the paper will trace the policies and legal documents relating to the NTP-NRD promulgated by different stakeholders including the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), the National Assembly, the government of Vietnam, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and other relevant government bodies. In so doing, the paper will identify the role of those stakeholders, especially the CPV, and their contributions to the formation of the NTP-NRD. The following questions will be answered in this paper: When did the formation of the viewpoints on and the policies of NTP-NRD in Vietnam start? How have the viewpoints progressed and improved? The paper starts discussing the concepts such as new rural area, new rural

development program, then uses these understandings to look back at the history of policy making of the CPV and other government bodies.

2. The concepts of “new rural area” and “new rural development program”

There have been many legal documents passed during the process of building the NTP-NRD, yet no document clearly defines what “new rural area” and “new rural development” are. However, the characteristics of “new rural area” have been relatively clarified. The Resolution 24/2008/NQ-CP dated October 28th 2010 on “The promulgation of the Government’s Action Program on the implementation of the Resolution of the 7th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party’s the 10th Congress on agriculture, farmers and rural area”, summarizes the key contents of NTP-NRD as “developing and organizing the rural population’s life towards civilization and modernization, while preserving cultural identity and ecology in association with the development of cities and towns”. Thus, “new rural area” is the highly developed state of the rural society, in which, all aspects from people, culture, ecology and environment, and economy are all important. Decision 491-QĐ/TTg dated April 16th 2009 on “The promulgation of the set of national criteria for new rural area” helps quantify what “new rural area” is into specific criteria. In particular, to be recognized as a “new rural commune”, there are five major areas, comprising 19 main criteria and 39 sub-criteria to be compulsorily met. The five major areas cover all aspects of the society, including rural area planning; socio-economic infrastructure; economy and production organization; culture, society

and environment; and political system. Taking culture - society - environment area for instance, there are four main criteria that are education, healthcare, culture and environment. In each of those criteria, there may be smaller measurable and assessable indicators. For example, to be considered as accomplishing healthcare criterion, the percentage of local people holding health insurance and the commune's healthcare sector must meet the national standards. Reaching all 19 criteria is the requirement for being viewed as completion of new rural development. However, according to some of our interviews with local authorities, there are some exceptions. For example, a commune can be classified as a new rural commune if it meets 18 out of 19 criteria. Data from field notes reveal that some criteria such as building market can be flexibly viewed as being met if there is already a market in other near communes that is convenient for local people's everyday trade.

From the set of national criteria for new rural area, it can be drawn out some first issues as follows:

First, it is necessary to define what is "new" and what is "old". Unfortunately, there is a lack of clarification of the two concepts and the differences between them. It can be confused that the reform from the old state to the new one might suggest the removal of all old features and at the same time, inventing new qualities. This mistaken approach can cause serious misunderstanding in some cases. For example, building new cultural house (*Nhà văn hoá*) is projected to create a new community space for cultural and spiritual activities of local people, enhancing locality's cohesion. However,

based on new standards of modern house construction, this kind of new cultural house indeed fail to be a gathering place for the natives because it does not take into consideration cultural tastes and local customs (for instance, local people in some areas love to assemble in their village head's house or a stilt house at the center of the village rather than a built concrete house located far way from their places. It is therefore necessary to clearly assert that these two terms "old" and "new" do not indicate the opposition and separation between the two, rather, it implies that there is an evolutionary step linking them together – a qualitative transformation from the lower state of development to the higher one. This qualitative progress must thoroughly consider what old elements of the locality should be kept, what should be adjusted, and then what should be newly built based on local needs, rather than just building the new ones by destroying the old.

Second, the NTP-NRD takes commune as the basic unit. It can be said that rural society is miniaturized into rural communes. The progress of district and province levels in new rural development must rest on the achievement of their communes. To be recognized as a new rural district, there must be at least 75 percent of its communes reaching the new rural commune status. A province finishes its new rural development program if it has 80 percent of new rural districts. Neither new rural area criteria for district level nor for province level is required in the set of national criteria. Nevertheless, the rural development of a district or a province as the whole in its own right is more than just the success of separated rural communes. It is worth

noting that the strong connections among different communes/wards in a district, and among different districts in a province also play a crucial role in rural growth of that district or province. Furthermore, weak governance and administration at district and provincial levels might be a barrier in obtaining the goals of the new rural development program. These concerns require the government of Vietnam to take into account not only commune level but also district and province levels in order to build a more comprehensive new rural development program.

Third, by proposing the set of national criteria for new rural area, it seems that the government of Vietnam expects the accomplishment of all 19 criteria (quantities) will lead to the revolution in terms of qualities. However, there is a lack of indicators scientifically assessing that qualitative progress. No insurance can be confirmed that a new rural commune competing all 19 criteria can turn their quantitative changes into a qualitative jump. Another concern is that these criteria might not all suit the local needs. For example, a commune has to invest a large amount of capital in construction of concrete roads following the transportation standards while what they need first is indeed to develop agricultural production in order to reduce hunger and poverty of their people. The inflexible requirements of the set of national criteria might result in the imbalance of the development process of the local areas. There will be some communes that be pulled back to poverty due to invest too much in road construction, while some others are richer though they have not met half of the set. One of the most important

rules of thumb in development theories is that local people should be the one who decide their development goals and path. That is to say, criteria for new rural area should be derived from each local people's needs and agreement.

Fourth, new rural development is designed based on regional differences. The national criteria have been set for specific socio-economic regions, including the Northern Midland and Mountainous region, the Red River Delta, the North Central region, the South Central Coast region, the Central Highlands, the Southeastern region and the Mekong Delta. This means that the criteria applied to communes in the Red River Delta are different from those in the Central Highlands. For example, the percentage of households having access to clean running water under national standards in the Red River Delta and the Southeastern regions - considered the most developed areas - must be 90 percent while the required rate for the Northern Midland and Mountainous region is only 70 percent. However, it might be wrong to assume that all communes in the two former areas are on the better basis than all the communes in the latter area. Hence, new rural development program should be concerned with distinctions at the lower levels, i.e., the specificity of social, cultural, economic characteristics of each commune, district or province. Respecting all these local features such as resources, needs, natural environment leads to building a more reliable and creditable set of criteria in the evaluation of new rural area.

The making of the policies on new rural area requires the participation of many different political entities, including the CPV, the government of Vietnam, MARD,

relevant departments and sectors, and agencies of the local government. It is worthy of note that in current political system, the CPV plays a crucial and leading role in creating legal framework and policy environment for the not merely NTP-NRD but every development programs. In particular, via its National Congresses of the Communist Party of Vietnam (hereinafter referred to as the Party Congress) held every five years, the CPV proposes the overall direction and development strategy in a long-term period (often in 5 years or 10 years). Based on National Congress's approved documents, the CPV convenes plenums during the five-years tenure to direct and guide the government of Vietnam and other government's bodies in order to achieve direct and short-term goals. The documents such as resolutions, political reports, socio-economic development directions and tasks announced at the Congress or the Party's Plenum are fundamental to constructing policies and legal documents formulated by the government of Vietnam, National Assembly and other relevant bodies. Based on these CPV's guiding documents, the government issues its resolutions and the Prime Minister issues decisions to realize the Party's goals in reality. On that basis, ministries, among which MARD is the ministry in-charge, leading NTP-NRD. Relevant ministries and sectors develop circulars, joint circulars to work together in achieving the goal and objectives of the program. The administrative bodies such as the provincial, district and commune people's committees concretize the general action plan proposed at the central level in their localities and submit periodic reports. The relations among these actors are evident in the pre-formation, formation, and development

of NTP-NRD policies described below.

3. History of the development of new rural development policies

Resolution 26 was issued at the 7th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (the 10th Congress) on agriculture, farmers and rural areas (*Tam Nông*) on 5th August 2008 (hereinafter referred to as Resolution 26) is considered as the starting point of NTP-NRD. However, the emergence of the ideas, the formation of policies on this Program should be traced back to the 4th Congress of the CPV in 1976.

3.1. The pre-formation period (1975-1990)

Thorough examination of the Party Congress's documents and resolutions reveals that before the advent of Resolution 26, the terms "new rural area" and "new rural area development" have been used since the 4th Congress. Still, it is necessary to tell the difference in the natures of the concepts in each period of time, which will help pinpoint the evolution of the two concepts "new rural area" and "new rural development".

After the country was reunified in 1975, agricultural development was not solely seen as one of the two basic tasks apart from the heavy industry development, but also considered as the highest and most urgent task (see Report on the direction, tasks and key objectives of the 5-year plans of 1976-1980 issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam at the 4th Party Congress).

The term "new rural development" was mentioned three times in the aforementioned report. There are three notable points in terms of the view on new rural area policies in this document.

Firstly, although NTP-NRD is considered

a task in close connection with agricultural development, it is only limited to the replanning and rearrangement of residential areas, production, and cultural activities, without the comprehensiveness as outlined in the set of national criteria under Decision 491/QĐ-TTg (2009).

Secondly, new rural area, from the CPV's point of view, is the socialist rural area on the advanced level of development state compared to the under developed, small and fragmented rural area, which was devastated by war, with the lack of capabilities to meet the essential needs for foods and industrial inputs, especially mixed with capitalist elements in the South before the national reunification.

The view of new rural area as the socialist rural area, remains as an ideal at this time, however this has not been clearly defined yet. In Resolution No.41-NQ/TW issued in 1981, the new rural area means the transformation of the traditional production relation to the new socialist production relation coupled with the improvement in the material and spiritual life for the rural people. It can be concluded that, new rural area was started emerging as an idea, yet it stayed vague and unclear in terms of the content of the concept. "New rural area development" was just the term attached to agricultural development without being as clarified independently with a clear focus as the present viewpoint.

During the tenure of the 4th Central Committee, new rural area was mentioned only once at the 11th Plenum (December 1981). The term also did not appear in any documents presented at the 5th Congress (March 1982). Then this term was found once in Resolution 06-NQ/TW announced

at the 3rd Meeting of the 5th Party Central Committee themed "The socio-economics direction and missions in 1983 and the goal set for 1985" (dated December 10th 1982). Nevertheless, the concept of new rural area did not provide any new contents, but still connecting it with "socialism."

In the period of 1981-1985, there was an important speech by Mr. Vu Oanh, a member of the Party Central Committee and chairman of the Central Agriculture Committee, delivered at a symposium on agriculture held by the Institute of Sociology (April 16th - 17th 1984). The speech stressed the over emphasis on economic development (agricultural development) without due attention paid to social aspects. He bravely confessed "Our mistake is belittling the social aspects [of the social development], implying that we have yet to clearly and comprehensively understand the goal of the Party." This could be a turning point in terms of awareness of the Party leaders in associating the development of agriculture with rural area as the whole.

Mr. Vũ Oanh also pointed out some directions of new rural development strategy such as connecting the production level, the volume and quality of products and goods with population growth; providing reasonable consuming policies; applying culture into everyday life and production; attracting manpower, especially the youth coming to the rural area for the agricultural production development. These ideas, though still vague, helped shape the viewpoints on new rural area for the next Congresses.

It is not surprised that the view on new rural area was not continued being further developed at the 6th Congress of renovation in 1986 as the main goal of this Congress was to bring Vietnam out of the crisis.

3.2. The beginning period of 1991-2005

It can be argued that the view on new rural development started to take shape systematically at the 7th Party Congress (June 1991).

In the political report at the 7th Congress, the term “new rural development” was mentioned twice, but the content was also nothing new compared to the previous ideas. The socialist new rural development was reiterated as a duty besides agricultural development. The whole content of new rural area was remained imprecise apart from being identified to include social aspects besides economic matters: “... governments and socio-political organizations take care of social aspects and new rural development.”

However, there are two important documents at that Congress. The Resolution of the 7th Congress adopted the “Strategy of the socio-economics stabilization and development towards 2000” on June 27th 1991, in which, the term “new rural area” was mentioned six times and the term “rural area” appeared 22 times. There are several notable points in this document: (i) New rural area associating with agricultural development is emphasized as the most important task in the period of 1991-2000 “to stabilize the socio-economics situation”; (ii) In new rural development, the role of farmers and rural residents is principal. In detail, the potential of farmer households should be further promoted in economic development. It is worth noting that the importance of farmers as the owners and beneficiaries of new rural development process is repeated in the political Platform (1991) and clarified in Resolution 26 (2008); (iii) The building of the socio-economic infrastructure is invested and

supported by the State; (iv) New rural area is tied to “new culture”, “social progress” in education, healthcare, poverty alleviation; (v) New rural area is also associated with the planning of the rural society in a reasonable manner, serving as the foundation for economic development.

More importantly, new rural development is one of the focal points of “The platform for the national development in the transition to socialism” (1991). In the platform, the term “new rural development” appears twice, in which “the development of agriculture - forestry - fishery associated with the processing industry and new rural development being important tasks to stabilize socio-economics situation” is considered one of the major directions for economic, social, national defense-security, and foreign affairs policies in the transitional period.

One of the major points of the platform is to define the role of farmers in new rural development. While the working class is defined as the pioneers in building socialism, the intellectual provides intellectual resources for the country; the peasantry is the fundamental force in the new rural development process. This is the basic idea shaping the “mastery role” of the farmers in the socio-economic development that the CPV systematically outlined in Resolution 26-NQ/TW.

In Resolution 02-NQ/HNTW on “The tasks and solutions to stabilize and develop socio-economics for the period of 1992-1995,” adopted on December 4th 1991, the term “new rural development” was mentioned. The Resolution says that “cooperative household members” with the role as the “autonomous economic units” are tied to new rural development. One of the important

points that Resolution 02 puts forwards is that “to create a favorable environment and conditions for the collective, cooperative household member, household and private economic sectors to develop and contribute to new rural development”, problems, especially land issues, should be addressed. This could be regarded as the basis for the building of the amended Land Law in 1993 and Land Law in 2003.

It can be said that the view on new rural area was advanced to a new, more systematical level, only after the 7th Party Congress, particularly in Resolution 05-NQ/HNTW promulgated at the the Fifth Plenum of the 7th Central Committee of CPV (dated June 10th 1993) themed “Continuing the renovation and development of the rural area”. The term “new rural development” was used four times in this Resolution.

For the first time after the national reunification, the CPV identified new rural area as a broad concept, in which economic activities are only one aspect. This is completely different from the concept devised in earlier documents, which see new rural area development as just one task following up economic development. This stand point was included in the section of “innovation and development of agriculture and rural areas” in the “targets towards 2000”. New rural development was officially stated as a general task. In other words, new rural development is not merely to solve the social issues following economic development, but also to aim at the societal development of rural area in relation to urban society. This standpoint also incorporated many respects into the so-called “new rural development”, such as economy, culture,

infrastructure, social needs of farmers, political system, democracy, social equality, social solidarity, social order, defense and security, eco-environmental issues, and planning. Also in this document, the role of socio-political organizations, especially Farmers’ Union is addressed, reemphasizing the significant part of farmers as the major actor in rural development. These aspects are all mentioned later in the set of national criteria.

In the period 1996 - 2001 witnessed another interruption in the development of the theory on new rural area. The political report of the 7th Central Committee of CPV presented at the 8th Congress in 1996 only referred new rural area once, stressing that “The building of the socio-economics infrastructure, gradually forming the civilized and modern rural area” is one of the focal points of the industrialization and modernization of agriculture and the rural area after 10 years of transformation. Surprisingly, the report entitled “Direction and missions for the 5-year socio-economics development plans 1996-2000” at this Congress did not come back to “new rural development” idea once. So neither did the subsequent Plenums in the tenure of 1996-2000 nor other important documents adopted at the 9th Congress in 2001, such as the Socio-Economics Development Strategy for 2001-2010, the report on the direction and tasks of the 5-year social-economics development plans 2001-2005.

The 5th Plenum of the 9th Central Committee of CPV on March 2nd 2002 approved five different resolutions, including the Resolution on “Accelerating agriculture and rural area industrialization and modernization period 2001-2010” (hereinafter referred to as

Resolution No.12-NQ/TW). That was the first time after 6 years since the 8th Congress that new rural area and new rural development were readdressed, despite appearing just once in the whole document. Though the content of new rural development was solely brief compared to that of in Resolution 05-NQ/HNTW (1993), Resolution No.12 significantly pointed out that new rural development needs to be linked with “the development of the commodity production”. The association of new rural area with commodity economy somewhat showed a shift in the CPV’s thought of socio-economics development, from based on centrally-planned economy to market-oriented principles. The shift from the old production relation to a higher production relation of commodity market economy would create a turning point in the development of a new rural society.

3.3. The formation and implementation of new rural development since 2006

At the 10th Party Congress in 2006, the term “new rural development” appeared 3 times in the “Report on the direction and tasks of the 5-year socio-economics development plans 2006-2010.” The report reconfirmed that “economic development” must be accompanied by new rural development. The tasks of new rural development were identified as the construction of infrastructure and providing solution to social issues.

One of the main points in this “Direction” is that for the first time the building of “new rural development program” was officially proposed. “Building new rural development program aims at developing a civilized life in villages, being associated with the formation of urbanized

residential areas.” This view can be considered as the foundation for the advent Resolution No. 26-NQ/TW (Resolution 26) on “agriculture, farmers and rural areas” and the NTP-NRD.

Resolution 26 marks a remarkable turning point in the evolution of the view on new rural area and new rural development. This Resolution presents a relatively comprehensive theory of the relations among three big areas: agriculture, farmers and rural area. In this document, the term “new rural area” appears 9 times, and “new rural development” 7 times. This document identifies the following important points:

First, agriculture, farmers and rural area are closely tied together, in which agriculture is an economic sector besides industry, construction and service sectors; farmers are a social force besides other classes and social strata such as the working class, intellectuals, entrepreneurs; and the rural area is a social area besides the urban area. Farmers are “the subject of the [rural] development” (that is to take the central and leading role) of agricultural and rural development. New rural development program must be closely associated with the development of the industrial economy, services and urban area. Compared to the Platform (1991), the role of farmers is more precisely defined. Farmers are considered the designated forceable to “play the mastery role in new rural area”.

Second, the Resolution also clarifies aspects of “new rural area”, including socio-economics structure, social planning, stability, culture, intellectual standard, ecology and political system. This view paves the way for the development of “new rural development” program or the so-called “NTP-NRD”.

Third, new rural area should be understood as an advanced state of development based on new criteria. That is, to reach that state of new rural area, “a rural society of stability, peace and democracy associated with a rich cultural life imbued with national identity must be built” and only by doing so, can Vietnam generate “the impetus for the development of agriculture, new rural development, improving farmers’ living standard.” To concretize the recognition of new rural area, the Resolution devises detailed goals for each development stage. For example, by 2010, the goal is “to implement a step of new rural development program”, and by 2020, “50 percent of the communes nationwide will be recognized as new rural communes”. The Resolution also defines that it is necessary “the new rural development program should be conducted based on specific criteria” and these criteria should take into consideration the specific features of different regions, particularly for the upland and needy communes.

Fourth, priority is paid to infrastructure development, serving as the basis for improvement of other sectors. “The implementation of new rural development program must be conducted with infrastructure construction one step ahead,” marks the Resolution.

In sum, Resolution 26 is the basis for building the alleged NTP-NRD and related policies.

Based on Resolution 26, the government of Vietnam issues Resolution 24 to realize Resolution 26 of the CPV. Resolution 24 officially turned the development guidelines of the Party into a realistic action plan, or in other words, turning it from theory to practice nationwide. Resolution 24 has

concretized Resolution 26 by setting five targets for the Action Program of the Government. They are the development of a comprehensive agriculture sector on modernized basis and large commodity production; training of human resources in the rural areas; improvement of the material and spiritual life for the rural dwellers; completion of the rural socio-economics infrastructure development; and improvement of disaster prevention and consequence mitigation. Based on these targets, the government identifies five groups of key tasks. They are the unification of awareness and actions in terms of agriculture, farmers and rural areas; the building of the national target programs by 2020, of which new rural development program is the one besides the “climate change adaptation” and “rural human resource training” programs; the improvement of the quality of planning and planning management, such as land use, transport, irrigation, agriculture - forestry - fishery structure; building specialized projects such as the development of farming and husbandry; and law and policy projects such as the further amendment of the Land Law.

In the formation of NTP-NRD, MARD is the in-charge unit. Collaborating agencies include ten ministries (Ministry of Planning and Investment; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment; Ministry of Transportation; Ministry of Construction; Ministry of Industry and Trade; Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs; Ministry of Education and Training; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism; Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs) and people's committees of provinces and cities. Thus, the development and implementation of

new rural area program requires the participation and close coordination among ministries, sectors and local governments at various different levels, especially in policy making. According to Circular No.54/2009/TT-BNNPTNT, dated August 21st 2009 named “The instruction for the implementation of the set of national criteria for the new rural areas” as for the planning criteria, there are up to 81 legal documents and policies of diverse government agencies, serving as the basis for evaluation.

Based on Resolution 24 and Resolution 26, on April 16th 2009, the Prime Minister issued Decision 491/QĐ-TTg on “The Promulgation of the Set of National Criteria for New Rural Development,” followed by Circular 54/2009/TT-BNNPTNT on “The instruction for the implementation of the Set of National Criteria for New Rural Development” dated August 21st 2009. On June 4th 2010, the Prime Minister signed a decision on “The approval of NTP-NRD for period 2010 - 2020”, which clearly states the general goals and specific targets towards 2020. For example, the specific targets for 2015 set the rate of 20 percent communes reaching new rural area criteria. By 2020, the goal is 50 percent. The specific contents of the criteria set included in the implementation of the program consist of specific targets, basic contents and the assignment of missions to various different ministries, sectors and localities. On September 20th 2010, the Central Steering Committee for NTP-NRD adopted Plan No.435/KH-BCĐXDNTM titled “The implementation of NTP-NRD for period 2010-2020.” Together with Decision No.1013/QĐ-TTg on the establishment of the Central Steering Committee for NTP-NRD period 2010 - 2020, this plan served as the foundation for

the official establishment of the Standing Committee of the Central Steering Committee, the Coordination Office of the program, and the steering committees at province, district, townlet and commune levels to carry out the Program.

The set of national criteria for new rural area has then been amended and supplemented with Decision No.342/QĐ-TTg signed on February 20th 2013 by the Prime Minister, followed by Circular 41/2013/TT-BNNPTNT on “The direction for the implementation of the set of national criteria on new rural areas”, outlining the methods to meet the criteria. Notably, the Prime Minister also determined that “The criteria should be adjusted in accordance with the socio-economics conditions of the country in different periods of time” (Decision 491-QĐ-TTg). Article 3 of Circular 54/2009/TT-BNNPTNT also emphasizes the active role and flexibility of each province. The consideration and recognition of new rural communes, therefore, rely on the set of the national criteria combined with other additional criteria under different situations (Article 23, Circular 54).

4. Conclusion

The pre-formation and formation of theoretical perspectives of new rural areas and new rural development have undergone many historical changes that strongly associated with the evolution of the CPV’s strategies. The CPV plays the central role in making and adjusting long-term directions of rural development in particular, and country growth in general. The government turns the direction into the action plans and guides the implementation of the Program. The Coordination Office and MARD have been in charge of coordination, monitoring and evaluation of the Program nationwide.

Local authorities, especially at the commune level, are the ones who apply the action plan into their local context.

The concept of new rural development, despite emerging very early in the late 1970s, has undergone many changes and adjustments before becoming a national target program. From just a single idea, full of theory and vague in content, “new rural development” has been evolved into a relatively comprehensive, widespread, and measurable social development program. That is a process of legal framework development and policy making, closely linked with the socio-economics and political advancement of the whole country. This paper hopes to provide the premise for follow-up studies to look more deeply into the relations between political, economic and social events with the amendment, supplement, and making of new policies. Further studies may also find this article the basis for the research on the impact of policies on the socio-economics development in different periods or the role of the people’s participation in new rural development program, or the effectiveness and the suitability of the criteria for the NTP-NRD.

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